

For immediate release

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City, County and Stakeholders Announce Public Process to Plan Next Steps for Downtown Columbus New Apartments for Grant and Gay Also Announced

Mayor Michael B. Coleman today joined a group of downtown residents, business owners, developers, retailers and advocates to outline the progress of the Downtown Business Plan launched in 2002 and next steps for bringing new investment, people and activity to the central business district. The team announced a series of public town hall meetings to get citizen input on a long-term strategic plan for Downtown's next 10 years of development.

"Downtown is the economic center of the region, home to more than 80,000 jobs, creating more than 20 percent of our local income taxes that pay for neighborhood services, and we need to keep it healthy," said Mayor Coleman. "We've come a long way in the past few years, but more needs to be done as we build our way out of a tough recession. Downtown is everyone's neighborhood. Many of us come here for dining, entertainment and recreation, and many of us work or live here."

The Mayor was joined by Franklin County Board of Commissioners President John O'Grady; City Councilmember Andrew J. Ginther, Guy Worley of Capital South and the Columbus Downtown Development Corporation; Cleve Ricksecker, executive director of the Capital Crossroads and Discovery District SIDs; Michael DeAscentis of Lifestyle Communities; and Alex Shumate, CDDC board member.

"I'm encouraged to see the Downtown Business Plan continue to evolve as we begin a new decade of development and progress," said Commissioner O'Grady. "The Franklin County commissioners have actively worked with the City of Columbus to make the dream of a revitalized Downtown a reality. We look forward to welcoming new neighbors as we near completion on the new Franklin County Courthouse and start the second season at Huntington Park."

The Downtown Strategic Plan will come from a series of three town hall meetings, hosted by the City, CDDC and moderated by MSI Design, beginning February 16 at Columbus State Community College.

"The 2002 Business Plan was a success because it set out a clear agenda for priorities and investment in our Downtown," said Worley, president and CEO of the Columbus Downtown Development Corporation. "The best ideas came from a gathering of the best minds and we hope to have the same energy and excitement as we set action steps for the next 10 years."

Mayor Coleman described local success in housing, parks and other projects, and announced another new apartment building that will be built near the Columbus College for Art and Design for college students. The 68 unit building will be home to 136 residents at the corner of Gay Street and Grant, opening in the late summer of 2011.

“Job creation and growth in the Downtown are key to the long-term economic success of Columbus and the Central Ohio region,” said Councilmember Ginther, chair of the Finance and Economic Development Committee. “Last year Columbus voters supported a three-point plan to move Columbus forward, which included a commitment to do all that we can to create jobs and grow the Columbus economy. That effort begins Downtown, and the strategy we are developing now will carry us through the next stage of economic development in our city’s core.”

Attracting jobs to downtown will continue to be a major focus of the city’s agenda, and one way it is getting done is through a partnership with the Capital Crossroads and Discovery District SIDs to attract more retail outlets.

“The work of the past eight years has set the stage for another wave of private investment in downtown, particularly in the retail sector,” said Ricksecker. “Downtown is extremely well positioned for growth.”

Successes of the 2002 Downtown Business Plan:

1. Building more Downtown housing:

Through city incentives, 2,542 units were built since 2002, another 2,468 units are under construction or in development, and the Downtown population has reversed its 50-year decline, increasing by more than 2,000 since 2003.

2. Concentrating development of new mixed use neighborhoods:

Development has continued along the Gay Street corridor, with restaurants, hotels and new residential housing. The RiverSouth neighborhood, once filled with 23 blighted, underutilized blocks, is now bustling with activity, anchored by the newly renovated Lazarus Building to the north and the new County Courthouse under construction on the south. Columbus Commons began with demolition of City Center Mall in October 2009 and the park is set to open in December 2010. The city and the Capital Crossroads Special Improvement District are working to bring retail back, from seasonal farmers markets, to the hiring of a full time retail ambassador to help fill empty storefronts, and working together on the Mile on High plan to attract retail back to High Street.

3. Bringing jobs Downtown to stabilize the office market:

In 2003, office vacancy rates peaked at 26 percent, but ended 2009 at 14.7 percent, while 1,000,000 square feet of office space was added. Two thousand incentivized jobs were added through city tax incentives to 25 companies.

4. Developing the riverfront as park and promenade:

The riverfront’s North Bank Park is open, as is the new Grange Audubon Center on the Whittier Peninsula, which was built through a partnership with Metro Parks. The Scioto Mile is set to open in June of 2011, funded through a historic partnership between the public and private sectors.

5. Improving parking and transportation:

Capitol South and the City of Columbus opened two new public parking garages, with 1,450 spaces. Two new bridges are connecting the east and west sides of the river at Main Street and at Town and Rich streets. New efforts are being made to add bike routes, trails and racks Downtown to make the area more rider-friendly. Columbus and the State of Ohio received a federal grant to start 3C Rail service with a new station to be built Downtown. In partnership with COTA and MORPC, the city will continue to work on solutions to create a multi-modal hub at the downtown station where 3C rail meets future light rail lines, bus lines and other transportation alternatives.

6. Going beyond the Business Plan

The Columbus City Schools invested in a Downtown High School, on the corner of Mound and Fourth, which opened in January 2008. A new Downtown Convention Hotel will be a reality by the end of 2012. With 500 rooms, the new Hilton will help us be a national contender for travel, tourism and conventions.

Huntington Park, home of the Clippers, is an award-winning baseball stadium that opened in spring 2009 and has become the place to be. The County Courthouse is under construction.

<http://home.columbus.gov/tv/vod/downtown-master-plan.wmv>